

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Myerscough College

June 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses. The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 62/95

MYERSCOUGH COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected December 1994 – February 1995

Summary

Myerscough College is an agricultural college which has responded well to developments within further education and diversification of its provision has led to the expansion of student numbers. A clear, effective, dynamic planning process has enabled the development of a high-quality, well-informed strategic plan. Marketing is of a high standard. The work of the college is strongly supported by a committed governing body. The college has a caring and supportive approach to its students which they value. It is developing centralised student services. Staff are well qualified and experienced and freely give additional time to those students who experience difficulties. Teaching is of a good standard. The commercial units, such as farms, enable learning to be set in a realistic and stimulating context. Students are highly motivated and show considerable commitment to their chosen vocations. Attendance rates are high. Although the college has a clear and well-documented quality assurance system the monitoring of some cross-college initiatives is not sufficiently rigorous. Some teachers are reluctant to share responsibilities with colleagues or to delegate, even when it would be more efficient and effective to do so. The college should develop its specialist careers and counselling services more fully and encourage their use. Management information systems are not comprehensive and reliable; those which exist are not always best used by managers. Information technology resources are limited. The college should address the variation in pass rates between courses.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture	2	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Animal care	2		
Equine	2		
Horticulture	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Myerscough College took place during 1994-95. Interviews with potential students were observed in July 1994 and enrolment and induction procedures in September 1994. An open day and an awards ceremony were attended in October 1994. Curriculum area inspections took place in December 1994. There was an inspection of aspects of cross-college provision in February 1995. A total of 46 inspector days were spent in the college. An inspector whose recent experience is outside the world of education was involved in the inspection process.

2 Inspectors observed 77 learning sessions, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with students, staff and members of the college corporation. They attended meetings of the senior management team, the college corporation and the finance and employment committee, and examined a variety of college documents. Over 20 meetings were held, with resident students, teachers, careers advisers, college consultants and with representatives of the local business and agricultural communities, and adult and higher education.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Myerscough College was one of the first agricultural colleges to be established in the country, opening in 1894 at Hutton, two miles to the south-west of Preston. The college retains premises at Hutton but its main site is now at Myerscough, seven miles north of Preston. A third site, six miles further north of Myerscough, at Winmarleigh, is due to close at the end of the present academic year. The Myerscough site, opened in 1969, comprises teaching and office accommodation, two farms, an equine unit, extensive glasshouses and nurseries, landscaped gardens, a horticultural unit and sports and recreational facilities. The Hutton site also contains a farm, and an animal care unit. The commercial units, such as the farms, provide realistic learning environments. Residential accommodation is provided for 336 students between the three sites. A further 160 residential places are currently under construction at the Myerscough site.

4 The college's mission commits it to the provision of high-quality education and training together with research, advisory and consultancy facilities for the industries it serves. This range of land-based industries now includes agriculture, animal care, arboriculture, ecology and conservation management, equestrian, farriery, floristry, horticulture, leisure, landscape, rural mechanisation, nursery stock production, and sportsturf and turfgrass science. In addition to its provision for further education, the college offers a number of higher education courses and is an associate college of the University of Central Lancashire. The college also provides courses in management and technical updating for industry and a range of non-vocational courses.

5 Many of the college's full-time courses recruit nationally and in some cases internationally. Part-time programmes and foundation programmes recruit more locally, mainly from within Lancashire, although a part-time distance-learning programme recruits internationally.

6 The major competitors of the college are the other major agriculture and horticulture colleges throughout the country. Those in closest proximity are Newton Rigg at Penrith, which lies 60 miles to the north and Reaseheath at Nantwich, 75 miles to the south. Although it has no significant competitor in Lancashire for its agricultural and specialist horticultural programmes, the college is to introduce leisure-based General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) as from September 1995; these will compete with other providers in the region.

7 The college has four teaching departments: agriculture, horticulture, mechanisation, and science and management. There are a number of servicing departments, including learning resources, marketing and business services, finance, registry and administration. A learning-support section provides support to all students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

8 At the time of the inspection there were 1,436 enrolments of whom 880 were full time. An additional 531 students were registered on a variety of full-cost courses. Over the last five years, full-time equivalent student numbers have grown by 89 per cent; the college plans growth of 256 per cent in the period 1989-2000 in enrolments on all courses including full cost and non-vocational. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college's strategic plan reflects a commitment to the national targets for education and training. Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) policies have a significant impact on planning and curriculum design, as shown by the addition of NVQs to some courses as an optional qualification, the modularisation of courses to provide greater flexibility and the recruitment of mature students.

10 The range of courses offered has increased rapidly in the last 10 years to 31 full-time and 34 part-time courses. Mature students have been more readily attracted to horticulture courses than to agriculture. There are various progression routes from foundation level courses to higher national diplomas. Effective liaison between the college and the University of Central Lancashire has increased opportunities for students to progress to higher education courses. The steady decline in numbers on part-time agricultural courses is making some provision vulnerable. The college is examining more flexible approaches to these courses particularly for those who live in more remote areas. Flexible-learning packages in agricultural

subjects have been developed and students are given options such as independent study, telephone assistance or joining a work study group. A flexible-learning programme for leisure management courses has recruited students from all regions of the British Isles and two students from Saudi Arabia. The college is an agricultural training board land-based training provider and members of staff are approved instructors.

11 There is a well-established, effective system of liaison with local primary and secondary schools. Open days and taster sessions are organised in consultation with staff from schools and provide stimulating events designed to attract potential students to the college. The college lambing week attracts large numbers of pupils from primary school and also pupils from special schools whose visits are organised by college students. Animal care students serve as judges at local junior schools during national pets week. Prospective students have many opportunities to visit the college to sample its activities. At Easter there is a residential event for those in their last years at school to enable them to participate both in taster courses and experience life as a residential student. The college gathers visitors' views on these events in order to plan future activities and inform the marketing unit. The Easter residential courses are particularly valued by prospective students.

12 The college has good working relationships with two training and enterprise councils (TEC): Lancashire Area West TEC and East Lancashire TEC. The college is responsive to TEC guidelines and objectives. Many staff, including the principal, are active in the Lancashire Area West TEC working groups. The TEC uses the college to deliver training programmes and has worked with the college to integrate management charter initiative units into courses funded by the European Social Fund.

13 All courses have strong links with industry. Technical advisory boards, whose members represent land-based industries, meet regularly with staff from the college and are encouraged to comment on and contribute to curriculum development. These links are strengthened through a network for work placements. Short courses are offered in response to industry's requests and clients express satisfaction with the quality of these courses and the technical expertise of Myerscough staff. The college undertakes product trials for industry and, where possible, students are involved in this work.

14 The college has varied international links with land-based industries and education providers. Staff and students often have opportunities for exchanges and work placements abroad. In 1993-94, members of the college took part in such activities in Eire, Portugal, Germany, Holland, France, Spain and the United States of America. An example of a development resulting from such exchanges is the establishment of a Mediterranean turf management area in a heated glasshouse, to support arboriculture and golf course management programmes of study. Recently

the college has received visits from teachers and students from Russia, Romania and Holland. Students also support agricultural projects in third world countries; they have raised money to buy a generator for a village in Ethiopia and a heifer camel for Farm Aid.

15 Links with the local community are strong. Floristry students are involved in a local harvest festival and the preparation of floral tributes at special events. Arboriculture students maintain trees at a local Cheshire home and all students raise funds annually for its residents through Christmas concerts. In conjunction with the county adult education department, the college initiated the development of 17 non-vocational courses in order to extend its links with the local community and to encourage adults back into education. Open days provide opportunities for participation in some of the activities of the college.

16 The college's marketing system is efficient and well managed. Research is undertaken methodically, analysed effectively and used to inform the planning and review of college provision. The college identifies the needs of its local industry by undertaking a labour market analysis and taking an active part in the Lancashire Area West TEC's rural steering group.

17 Information for prospective students is of a high standard, easy to read and attractive. The college's choice of photographs in the prospectus is carefully made to counteract stereotypical images. The information is widely distributed and contact points for further information are clearly identified. Although information on course fees is included in printed course materials, details of additional costs, such as the assessment fees and equipment requirements, are not provided. Students comment that they find this misleading. Careers offices and the local media are well informed of the activities of the college and achievements of its students. The college attends careers fairs and major horticultural and agricultural trade exhibitions. Organisers of these events are complimentary about the college's professional presentation. The college's organisation of the Dairy North West Trade Show in 1994, and their mailshot to over 10,000 farmers in the north west, was recognised when it received the Agricultural Research Council/Heist Further Education Marketing Award in 1994.

18 The college encourages the participation of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in a limited range of full-time and part-time courses. The planned development of NVQ level 1 courses increases opportunities for their progression and access to mainstream courses. There is hospital outreach provision and a short course is offered by the animal care unit for students with mental health problems. Students with hearing impairment and dyslexic students are provided with individual support that allows their successful integration into mainstream courses. Access to all college facilities for students with mobility difficulties is not always possible.

19 The college is aware of the difficulties in recruiting students from groups who do not normally enter further education and, more particularly, who do not consider courses for land-based industries. Market research has been undertaken to identify the reasons for the low enrolment of students with Asian backgrounds and leaders of the local Asian community have visited the college. Careers exhibitions have been staged in local community halls and the college is actively seeking support from the European Social Fund to offer NVQ levels 1 and 2 in horticulture specifically for minority groups. A short course in accounts for women in agriculture has recruited successfully and several students have progressed to courses in computer studies and business management. A recent taster course for women in horticulture led to some recruitment to the national certificate course. In spite of these initiatives, strong gender imbalances still exist. The college's equal opportunities forum has met infrequently and has not thoroughly addressed the provision of equal opportunities in the curriculum and in staff development. Support for students who are in a minority on courses because of their background or gender is not systematically provided.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The corporation's governing body and its committees work effectively. Governors show great commitment to the work and the social life of the college. They understand and respond to their strategic responsibilities without becoming too involved in the day-to-day operational matters of the college. The governing body meets regularly. Its meetings are well attended and efficiently minuted. Of the 17 members of the governing body, nine have direct experience of farming and horticulture. Other members bring with them experience of other industries, the community, the local TEC and higher education. The principal, a student, a teacher and a member of the support staff also sit on the board. The college secretary/personnel manager is the clerk to the governors. Only one member of the corporation is female although the college hopes to redress this imbalance when making appointments to two vacancies. There are three subcommittees: finance and employment; land and properties; audit and remuneration. These make good use of the specialist skills of governors and keep the governing body well informed of their activities.

21 The planning process within the college is clear and effective. It culminates in the production of the college's strategic plan, its operational objectives and performance indicators. It is a dynamic system that allows for annual review and development. The strategic plan is of a high standard. It contains excellent analyses of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the college and the labour needs of land-based industries locally, nationally and internationally. All areas of the college are covered by the academic development plan, operating statements and financial forecast. Departmental strategic planning processes reflect those of the college. Objectives set by the four departments are clear, comprehensive, realistic and relate well to those of the college.

22 The college has policies on equal opportunities, health and safety, quality assurance, and careers and also for capital equipment funding and replacement. Staff and students are particularly aware of health and safety issues and the implementation of the health and safety policy is closely monitored by an active working group. The careers policy is being implemented through a system of statements which set out the support students are entitled to receive. The policy for capital equipment funding and replacement is adhered to rigorously. The equal opportunities policy is not well monitored. Although the college does not have a written environmental policy, attempts are made to raise the awareness of staff and students to environmental issues. The college is in the process of developing an information technology policy.

23 The principal, the vice-principal and the director of finance and resources form the directorate of the college. The director of finance has been on long-term sick leave. However, extra financial help has been brought in and responsibilities have been satisfactorily re-allocated. The principal takes the lead on all strategic matters. The directorate is supported by a senior management team comprising four heads of department, a business services and marketing manager, a learning-resource services manager and the college secretary/personnel manager. The directorate and the senior management team meet together weekly and meetings are well run and efficiently minuted.

24 The heads of departments lead specialist areas. Responsibility for resource and programme management and the implementation of cross-college initiatives is clearly delegated to them. Programme management is generally effective: courses and students' progress are regularly reviewed. Monitoring of cross-college initiatives such as tutoring and course evaluation is not always sufficiently rigorous. Operating procedures between departments vary and this reduces opportunities to work together to achieve greater efficiency and to exchange good practice. The college information systems are not fully used by departments except in the support of recruitment activities. Job descriptions are not always adequately documented, and this leads to varied interpretations of roles.

25 Communication systems within the college are good. There is a regular cycle of meetings at departmental, programme and course level and from these information is sent to the academic board whose members advise on curricular matters. The majority of meetings are well documented and attended. Most minutes of meetings clearly allocate responsibility for action and target dates. Common briefings across the whole college enable staff to understand developments. Staff are also able to express their opinions and concerns through the college forum which is made up of representatives from all parts of the college. Part-time staff are not always kept as up to date on developments as their full-time colleagues.

26 Computerised databases are held on finance, students and marketing. The student database contains enrolment and course outcome information. Links between computerised and paper systems are sometimes weak. Budget holders are kept well informed through a system of monthly reports. Recent improvements provide senior managers with comprehensive information on the numbers of student applications. Monthly reports on students who withdraw from courses are cross-checked by a fortnightly register check. Information passed to the college registry by departments is not always complete and accurate. The college is examining the possibility of introducing a new computer-based, centralised management information system.

27 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £33.02 per unit. The median for agricultural and horticultural colleges is £28.37 and that for the sector as a whole is £19.01. Details of the income and expenditure for the 16 month period to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The system of delegating the budget for consumables and part-time staffing is fair; heads of department understand and fulfil their responsibilities in distributing and monitoring these resources. New courses are well supported by adequate resource allocation. The newly-introduced support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been sympathetically resourced. Future financial plans for this provision need to pay more attention to its growing resource needs.

28 Last year a firm of consultants produced an accommodation strategy for the college which concluded that there was no operational requirement to use more than one site. Accordingly, the corporation has established the clear aim of consolidating the college on the Myerscough site by the year 2000. The transfer of courses is carefully phased over the next four years. Winmarleigh site will close at the end of this academic year; the funds raised from its sale will be used to develop the Myerscough site ready for the eventual closure of Hutton in four years time.

29 The majority of staff are well deployed. Some classes are small, and students could be taught more efficiently in larger groups. The links, both formal and informal, between teachers and the support staff of the commercial units are good. Some teachers carry out duties such as administration and the preparation of practical work, which could be more efficiently undertaken by support staff. There is not always sufficient flexibility in the deployment of administrative staff.

30 The college sets and monitors a series of explicit and measurable performance indicators. These cover enrolments, general efficiency, marketing activities and staff development. Although their consistent and effective use in planning and review is yet to be achieved a good start has been made. Any course which does not achieve at least an 85 per cent pass rate is examined in detail although remedial action is not always forthcoming. Course managers try to collect student destination data but a high proportion of student destinations are unknown; the destinations of only a quarter of students on some courses are recorded.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 The college has a caring and supportive approach to students. Relationships between staff and students are good; staff are sensitive to and responsive to students' needs.

32 Procedures for the admission of students are clear and well documented. Staff understand the admissions policy of the college and apply the criteria for entry consistently, fairly and in the best interests of students. All prospective students have a guidance interview which is supportive and welcoming. Students have ample opportunity to ask questions about courses and the college. Those applying for equine courses are also assessed for their riding ability to ensure appropriate match with courses; this assessment is made as enjoyable as possible. Interviewers are well prepared and are asked to follow a common procedure through the use of a checklist. The records of most interviews are clear and full. Occasionally staff do not adhere to the college's guidelines on the recording of interviews, with the result that some pre-entry information is incomplete. Students who are uncertain about which of the land-based industries they wish to enter are not offered a general interview; specialist interviewing within courses is not always appropriate in this situation.

33 Staff set out to be supportive and welcoming during enrolment. However, the limited nature of the accommodation allocated to the exercise, the lack of a suitable reception point and the fact that all new students arrived at roughly the same time meant that some students had long waits and some were misdirected. Much of the paperwork completed during enrolment could have been sent to students in advance to decrease the time it took to enrol and to allow prospective students to give more consideration to their replies. Students whose circumstances or choices had changed since interview were not easily identified during the enrolment process. Students were not told of their allocation of on-site accommodation until enrolment; some were anxious about the costs of this accommodation which were higher than expected.

34 Despite a friendly welcome from the principal much of the first induction day was spent stressing rules, regulations and responsibilities rather than being an introduction to the college. There was a checklist of induction activities for staff but, nevertheless, some induction sessions were unplanned and consequently aimless. New students found the lack of site maps a drawback. Induction programmes at the smaller sites at Hutton and Winmarleigh were more welcoming to new students.

35 New students are able to have their prior achievements accredited. Few students request this service, but as modularisation develops, for example in agriculture courses, the college is well prepared to respond to such demands.

36 There is an effective screening process to identify students' learning support needs. The system includes numeracy and literacy assessments. Sometimes students are referred for support by staff and sometimes

students themselves indicate their wish for extra support. This identification process is handled in a sensitive manner. The learning-support unit meets the needs of students who are identified through this process. Students are offered individually tailored packages which cover a wide range of skills. For example, a student who requested mathematics support negotiated a programme which also included confidence building, personal finance skills and study skills to help him gain the most from his time in the college. There are also drop-in classes for study skills which are well attended. In-class support is available for students with a physical disability; for example, students with a hearing disability are provided with someone to translate information into sign language so that they can participate fully in courses. Not all students are aware of the extent of support which is available.

37 Students have two types of tutorial which provide them with at least two contacts for advice and support. Subject tutorials largely involve group activities and are usually led by the course or module tutor, and personal tutorials are normally one-to-one interviews with personal tutors. Most personal tutors teach their tutees. Staff commitment to these systems is high and they spend a lot of time with students. Few, however, have had more than rudimentary training for this area of their work.

38 The college has produced excellent tutors' and students' handbooks that set out aims and objectives for tutorials and the systems for their implementation. Staff do not always comply with these guidelines and thus students' experiences vary. Some one-to-one tutorials are well thought out, have clear aims which are shared with the student, and are held in private; others are less structured, rely heavily on the student's own assessment of progress and are held in rooms where other members of staff or students are present. Most subject tutorials are of a good standard, although some deal with topics which, according to college guidelines, are more appropriately dealt with as part of the personal tutorial system. A small number of tutorials are less effective due to lack of preparation by the tutor. Course leaders also organise tutorials to meet specific needs, such as careers education. These are valued by students. Monitoring of the effectiveness of tutorials, especially personal tutorials, by college managers is poor.

39 Students' records of personal tutorials, including their action plans, are of a high standard and efficiently filed in their handbooks. Central student records are good and most tutors' records are up to date. Many have full records of students' progress starting with their entry interviews. The records kept by tutors on animal care courses are exemplary; they give a clear picture of students' achievements and action planning for the future, as well as recording outcomes and actions to be taken from subject tutorials. Class registers are efficiently kept particularly on equine courses. There is an effective system for following up frequent absences; all students are aware of it and it is consistently applied by staff.

40 The monitoring of students' progress in the early stages of courses is sufficient to identify those who may be misplaced on their course. Although most students feel well informed about their progress on component parts of the course, some do not have a clear view of their overall performance. Both the learning-support unit and course tutors keep records of students' progress, but they do not keep personal tutors well informed of their tutees' performance. This is a major disadvantage when tutors are conducting one-to-one interviews. Parents of younger students are invited to visit the college to review with college staff the progress of their son or daughter. Many parents respond positively to this invitation and approximately 80 per cent attend review interviews.

41 There is an effective and efficient system for the recording of students' achievements. The process involves students analysing their strengths and skills, and planning for the future with the support of tutors. Occasionally in teaching sessions staff miss opportunities to emphasise to the students the skills they are acquiring. Students are provided with a high-quality handbook which outlines how to use information technology to record achievements.

42 All residential students are allocated a warden who looks after this aspect of their life in college. Students see wardens as very approachable and responsive to their needs. Many of the problems which residential students have are financial. The college operates a fund for those students with extreme financial problems. Residential students at Myerscough are able to pre-pay for meals termly, but it is not made clear enough to them that this is only intended to cover meals on weekdays.

43 The college is developing specialist student services including a careers guidance unit and a counselling service. Strategic planning for the expansion of the careers unit sets a high standard. Implementation is at an early stage; students and staff have been kept well informed of the services offered, there is a growing resource base and an easy system for students to contact both college and external careers advisers. Records are kept of students' use of this support and these are used for planning purposes. Careers guidance is strongly linked with the recording of achievement and student action planning systems used by the college. The careers unit also offers a service for students looking for part-time or holiday work, which they appreciate. Both specialist teaching staff and the careers unit provide support for students as they plan to leave the college. The careers unit also offers good support for those applying for higher education; this includes maintaining contact with those who might be on a work placement during the period for making applications. The college is often used by employers seeking new employees and this is a major benefit for students. Students appreciate the support they receive at this important time.

44 A trained counsellor is available for four hours a week; the potential of this service is yet to be fully realised. Tutors who have not been used to specialist support in the past still often try to provide careers guidance and counselling themselves rather than refer students to the appropriate specialist. This is unsatisfactory for students and staff. In particular, too much of a burden is placed on wardens when they are used in place of the counsellor.

45 The college offers a wide range of social and sporting activities. Every Wednesday afternoon students are given the opportunity to participate in a variety of sports, including regular sporting fixtures. In the evenings and at weekends there are trips out of college for ice skating or bowling, visits to local places of interest such as a local radio station and theatre, and internal events such as discotheques, snooker tournaments, quizzes and karaoke evenings. These are particularly important because so many students live away from home and the college sites are rural. Students speak of these activities with much enthusiasm.

TEACHING AND PROMOTION OF LEARNING

46 In the teaching sessions inspected 65 per cent of the sessions observed had more strengths than weaknesses. A summary of the grades for the lessons inspected is given below.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
NVQ		5	1	2	0	0	8
Other vocational		21	10	17	3	0	51
Other		4	9	4	1	0	18
Total		30	20	23	4	0	77

47 Learning activities are varied and include practicals, theory classes, tutorials, off-site visits and assignments. In the majority of classes students understand the aims of the session and its relationship to previous work. The relationship between theory and practice is often clearly established. In the best classes, the teachers discuss the earlier work to check the students' level of understanding and the topic development that follows is logical. Most classes have a summary session at the end which enables staff to pull together the main elements covered and help students see how it will fit in with future work.

48 A balanced variety of work ensures that the needs of individual students are met in the majority of theory classes. Students sometimes have the opportunity to reinforce their learning by practical investigations; for example, students finding difficulty with grass identification produced a detailed list with the teacher in the classroom and then went out to identify grasses on the campus. In some classes teachers skilfully direct questions to challenge students to think for themselves and participate

fully. In other classes, teachers arrange activities to enable them to give individual support. For example, in a session for day-release management students, after an introduction which revised previous work, students worked individually on an exercise about sources of credit while the tutor provided well-directed support for weaker students. All of the students worked enthusiastically at the task, clearly appreciating its relevance. In a minority of theory classes, didactic teaching is overused. Although many of the lectures are interesting and informative, they do not meet all students' needs; weaker students are not able to raise their concerns and there are too few opportunities to provide additional help.

49 Most practical sessions are well prepared and organised. A significant strength of much of the practical work is its realistic setting; often work is part of the operation of one of the commercial units. Students are able to appreciate the relevance of what they do and the realism of the setting is highly motivating. In one class, animal care students were given two tanks of fish with an assignment to develop an appropriate breeding programme to produce fish to sell. They worked well in pairs to identify their stock, using appropriate terminology; they made plans to record events and monitor environments; and they discussed appropriate strategies for increasing the stock. Often students are prepared effectively for their practical work by a demonstration by the teacher of the activity. In a class for block-release NVQ agriculture students, the teacher used a model of a calf to provide clear instruction on the application of a halter. After practising on the model the students were closely supervised when handling live calves. Difficulties in handling the stock were discussed individually and with the group. By the end of the session the students were confidently working with the animals. Students are carefully supervised during their practical sessions. Weaknesses are clearly identified and remedial action suggested. In the best examples, students gain an understanding of the related theory and are encouraged to analyse their own performance. A very small number of practicals involve mundane work of little educational advantage. On a few occasions, during practicals, the time spent working with the whole group rather than individuals is excessive.

50 Agriculture students make frequent use of the farms both for practical work and as a source of data for assignment work. Diploma level students are provided with management and practical experience by being given responsibility for growing a crop which includes preparing the ground, drilling the crop, and determining the fertiliser and pesticide requirements. The farms are also used by students from other courses. For example, a high priority is given to conservation in the running of the farms and students on countryside management courses help in a number of specific projects aimed at improving the habitat for wild plants and animals, including the regeneration of old woodland. Hedge planting at the Dinkling Green farm is carried out by students from agriculture, horticulture and land-management courses. Equine students undertook an assignment investigating the feasibility of reintroducing horses onto this farm.

51 Generally safe working practices are evident in practical sessions. For instance, in a national certificate course in arboriculture, practical health and safety issues related to tree climbing were addressed and the correct safety equipment supplied. There was a safe ratio of one member of staff to four students, organised so that one member of staff was always on the ground throughout the practical. Students' skills were well matched to the degree of difficulty of the task. Greater emphasis could have been given to the need for skin protection when working with machinery oils and fuel.

52 Students have good opportunities to increase their experience of the industry and develop their skills through work placements. These are selected to complement the students' previous experiences. Prior to the placement, both students and employers are well briefed on its aims and assessment requirements. The assessment of work placements by the student, the employer and teachers enhances its value. Placement work is often used as a basis for further study when students return to college.

53 Realistic exercises used as assignments enable students to develop their understanding of the subject under study. These exercises are often based on the college's commercial units or off-site visits. Following a visit to a local zoo, animal care students presented their findings in class. The students had produced a good range of effective visual aids to illustrate their work. The students successfully met the aims of the session, which were to evaluate the facilities, customer care and financial management for a collection of animals. Many students in the later stages of their courses are able to develop their management skills by working on case studies, often based on local commercial enterprises. These studies provide the students with the opportunity to draw together a number of themes covered in courses and to apply them to a real problem. In their final year, agricultural diploma students work on an exercise to develop a proposal for taking over the tenancy agreement of a local farm. They use the husbandry knowledge gained earlier in their course to establish a business plan for submission to a bank. An oral presentation to bank representatives or the farmer forms part of the assessment.

54 For a few assignments the written briefs give insufficient detail about the intended outcomes. This leads to wide variations in the quality of students' work. The work of some diploma students is over factual and there is insufficient encouragement for them to apply their knowledge. Written comments on the students' assignments are generally clear and instructive; they include sufficient technical detail to enable students to improve their performance.

55 Information for staff and students on the organisation of courses is generally of a high standard. Course guides are detailed and clear, making students aware of objectives, content and assessment requirements. Students often use the module guides produced for elements of the courses to structure their notes of the work. The documentation to help teachers

manage courses is generally good. There are clear schedules for assessments, planned for the whole academic year. However, the plans of work for individual elements of the course are often insufficiently detailed to avoid duplication and ensure effective co-ordination of the whole course. The extent to which communication and other personal skills are explicit in course documentation varies. Although clearly identified in some assessments they are superficial or non-existent in some schemes of work and lesson plans. Information technology is reasonably well established in the students' programmes of study. A separate element is generally devoted to a range of relevant information technology applications. Information technology is a significant component in the teaching of business and management studies. For some students, in the early stages of their programme, the technical curriculum contains insufficient information technology.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

56 The vast majority of students are highly motivated and show considerable vocational commitment. They are responsive in class and talk enthusiastically about their courses. Attendance rates are generally high and in excess of 90 per cent.

57 Students' written work and practical skills are appropriate to the level of their course. Students' lesson notes, records of practical work and diaries of work experience are well ordered and detailed; they provide a useful record for reference and revision. Assignments are clearly presented and show a good deal of effort. The content is often detailed and comprehensive. Many of the case studies written by students in their final year are well researched and achieve a high standard. For a small minority of students, weaknesses in literacy and numeracy inhibit their progress in the technical subjects.

58 Most students carry out their practical work carefully and conscientiously. They are generally mutually supportive when working as a team and, particularly when working with animals. Students' awareness of the practical and commercial relevance of their subjects is good. Data from the college's commercial units are used as illustrations in theory classes. Teachers are knowledgeable and have a good grasp of current issues in land-based industries. There are good examples of links between practical skills, commercial understanding and previously learned theory; for example national certificate horticulture students in a floristry practical made table decorations to be used at the Hutton Christmas dinner. The two assignments required one piece to be identical to that produced by the demonstrator and the other allowed students to create their own design. They were asked to think about the client's needs and when examined on plant identities, they were able to offer full-botanical names with ease. Their work was suitably skilled and they took a pride in it.

59 Last year, 89 per cent of those enrolled completed their course and took the final examination or assessment. The highest completion rates were in agriculture and equine courses. The lowest completion rate was for the first diploma animal care course, where only 75 per cent finished the course. Tutors' records indicate that many of the students who leave courses early do so for reasons not directly related to the course. For example, they leave to enter employment or because of personal financial constraints. Insufficient analysis is carried out where the completion rates are exceptionally low.

60 Pass rates for students who finish courses vary. Last year 88 per cent of students who completed their courses did so successfully; pass rates vary from 95 per cent of students on equine and animal care courses to 83 per cent on horticulture courses. One hundred per cent of students on the national diploma equine, national diploma animal care and national certificate horse management courses completed their studies successfully. About three-quarters of national diploma horticulture and national diploma horticulture (landscape) students were successful. Only 54 per cent of students on national certificate horticulture (landscape) courses completed the course and gained the full award.

61 Students who fail to gain the full award often do so because of failure to pass individual components of the course. Last year over three-quarters of students who failed to get the full award had gained credit for parts of the course. Some of these students subsequently retake the components they need to gain a full award. The college makes provision for students to retake examinations early in the autumn term. Many students do not take up this offer and the college is seeking ways to encourage a better response.

62 For most part-time NVQ courses, a high proportion of students who enrol at the start of the year successfully complete their studies in the time allowed. Last year, all of the students on six of the eight NVQ levels 1 and 2 courses were successful. However, only 52 per cent of NVQ level 2 agriculture students were successful in the target time. A quarter of the remaining students gained the full award in the following term and the vast majority are continuing their studies, some having already achieved units towards the full award.

63 Information on full-time students held by programme managers shows that a high proportion of those completing the course go on to further study or enter employment. Last year over 70 per cent of first diploma students went on to further education and a quarter entered employment. Overall in the college last year, 37 per cent of students went on to other courses, approximately a third of them to higher education, almost 50 per cent entered employment, and the destinations of 13 per cent were unknown.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

64 The college has a clear and well-documented quality assurance system. It is committed to establishing continuous improvement in all aspects of its activity. The comprehensive and detailed quality assurance handbook effectively sets out the system for implementing quality procedures. These have been the subject of a recent review and current arrangements are a consolidation and refinement of previous practice.

65 The quality system focuses on curriculum issues. Other college functions are not fully covered by the system. However, a number of quality groups have been established to address cross-college issues such as pastoral support. There is also a quality grouping of kitchen/catering personnel. The mechanisation department has already secured the ISO 9002 standard (formerly BS 5750), and the college aims to widen its application to other areas.

66 Overall responsibility for quality issues rests with the vice-principal who has the brief for quality and curriculum and leads the recently-formed quality assurance committee. Staff have clearly-defined roles and responsibilities in the review and monitoring processes of curriculum matters and some cross-college areas. Review procedures have recently been standardised across the college; the systems are well designed and call for self-evaluation at team, quality committee and corporate level.

67 Course teams produce annual reports with associated action plans and use information from external moderators and verifiers, student and employer surveys, as well as other quantitative data. In addition, boards of study consider related aspects such as the relevance of course content, recruitment, assessment, student performance and destinations. The reporting mechanisms and forms used to record these evaluations are impressive; they contribute to the creation of a departmental overview which is submitted to the quality assurance committee for scrutiny and then to the academic board. The terms of reference and links between the quality assurance committee and other groups, such as boards of study and technical advisory boards, are clearly set out in the quality handbook. Standards of action following the review vary; in animal care they are exemplary but in horticulture they are not. Despite improvements in the quality of information held centrally there remain some weaknesses in the co-ordination and reliability of data provided by courses. An objective measurement of performance against targets in terms of examination outcomes, retention rates or destinations has yet to be achieved.

68 The college gives significant emphasis to seeking the views of clients and employers and an external consultant has been used to develop procedures. The collection and collation of data from questionnaires is undertaken by the central registry and good use is made of this information by the college marketing unit.

69 Development opportunities are available for all staff and the college is committed to allocate funding for staff development equivalent to at

least 1 per cent of the staffing budget. The overall staff-development programme is co-ordinated by a staff-development officer. The priorities are aligned to strategic objectives; the applications process encourages this by requiring departments to demonstrate how a proposed activity meets corporate objectives. Priorities this year have been the development of management skills for middle managers, technical updating, assessor training, support for those teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and first aid training. Administration of the staff-development system is thorough, but there is little monitoring of the information and skills gained by staff.

70 There are well-established and well-documented procedures for the induction of both academic and support staff. A staff-appraisal system has been in operation for some time. Individual appraisal interviews are conducted in a professional and sensitive manner and training has been given to both appraisees and appraisers. The process is supported by well-defined criteria. There is no calendar of implementation so not all staff have been through the process. This has limited the success of the scheme.

71 A major target for the college is to achieve Investors in People status within the current year. To improve communications, a team briefings system has been introduced. This development ensures that staff at all levels are equally informed and updated on important policy and personnel matters. Although at an early stage of development, the initiative has been well received by staff.

72 Staff are aware of the national charter for further education. The college's own charter has made limited impact on the college's quality assurance procedures. There is an opportunity to reinforce the links between standard setting in relation to the college charter, the work taking place in respect of the extension of ISO 9002 procedures, and the Investors in People initiative.

73 The college's self-assessment report is written under the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report was drafted with the full involvement of the senior management team. Evidence was drawn from a wide range of college records although these are not formally cited or cross-referenced in the report. The information provided for inspection closely matched the report's format. It is impartial, helpfully descriptive of the college context, and realistic in its judgements.

RESOURCES

Staffing

74 Teachers show a high level of commitment. They are appropriately qualified and experienced. Half the teachers are qualified to degree level, approximately a third hold teaching qualifications, and over half have assessor qualifications. Most teachers have high levels of technical

expertise and practical competence. Half the teachers have been at the college for more than 10 years and consequently their experience in industry is dated. However, their close involvement in the running of the college's commercial units enables them to maintain a good understanding of current issues facing land-based industries. Some teachers' tutoring skills are insufficiently developed for their personal tutor responsibilities.

75 Responsibilities have broadened considerably over the last few years as the college has diversified. Teachers carry a range of duties in addition to their teaching; most have tutorial responsibilities and many are involved in college initiatives such as short courses, the commercial units and links with external bodies. Managers are often involved in a number of college initiatives as well as their own specific responsibilities. Some staff do not always manage their workload efficiently and this adversely affects their performance.

76 The proportion of part-time teachers, teachers on short-term contracts and instructors has increased over the last few years in line with strategic planning. This has enabled the college to respond to changes in demand, for example, in staffing new developments. Occasionally new part-time staff are not sufficiently integrated with other members of a course team. This has adversely affected the commitment to make students aware of how the various parts of their course fit together.

77 The level of support for academic staff varies. On the commercial units it is good, but in other areas it is limited. Support staff who work in the commercial units are used effectively when students are carrying out practical duties. Their supervision of the students adds to the realism of the working environment and they are also responsible for the internal assessment of students' performance. Audio-visual equipment is well maintained and there is support for staff and students in the production of audio-visual materials. There is inadequate technician support for information technology. The opening hours of the library at Hutton are restricted by the availability of staff. There is insufficient administrative support, especially for course managers and those with cross-college responsibilities. The college is in the process of making an appointment to provide more support.

Equipment/learning resources

78 Much specialist equipment is of a good standard and all of it is at least adequate. Effective arrangements for teachers to book equipment allow its use to be scheduled in advance by the technicians. The need to use the larger machines on both main sites, however, means that they cannot always be deployed efficiently. There is a good range and quantity of equipment and tools for agricultural students to carry out practical work. Farm livestock is sufficient in quantity and variety. A rigorous system for selecting loan horses and ensuring the control of horses' workloads is in place. There are enough horses usually to allow a good

match to the experience of the rider. However, the increasing number of riders means that, if a horse cannot be worked for health reasons, not all students can participate in riding lessons. Equine courses have sufficient tack and hand tools. There is an extensive horticultural plant collection and much of the horticultural equipment is comprehensive and modern. Resources include computer-controlled environmental units and an automatic watering system for the golf course. Some horticultural equipment, such as glasshouse heating, is becoming dated. Animal care courses are well supported by both livestock and equipment; animals kept include goats, geese, poultry, exotic birds, reptiles, tropical fish, amphibians and small mammals.

79 The main library at Myerscough has a wide range of learning materials, including some 14,300 books, over 100 periodicals, 3,000 pamphlets, 3,000 slides and 270 videos. A compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database workstation provides access to several specialist databases. The college has an on-line retrieval link with Lancashire county library. A comprehensive careers section includes books, periodicals and computer packages. Although the stock of books is generally adequate, the rapid rise in student numbers, coupled with diversification, has resulted in a few shortcomings. In most specialisms, students are critical of shortages of books for some assignments. Provision at the other two sites is restricted mainly to text material, though a CD-ROM workstation has recently been installed at the Hutton centre. The provision of specialist books at these sites is limited; there are 1,136 books at Hutton, and 468 at Winmarleigh. The arrangements for transfer of books between the sites are good and students are complimentary about the service. Most students at Hutton and Winmarleigh have weekly opportunities to visit the Myerscough library.

80 There are insufficient computers for the number of students; one computer to 17 full-time equivalent students. This shortage is most acute at the Myerscough centre. Although just over half the computers are on this site, the use here is much higher than the other two centres combined. A range of standard packages for general use is available on all machines. Access to the computers on all three sites is restricted when there are timetabled classes in the computer rooms; this reaches 50 per cent of the time for some weeks on the Myerscough site. The college has tried to alleviate this problem by making the computer room at Myerscough available at evenings and weekends through a booking system. Although the supply of machines at Hutton and Winmarleigh is adequate for the number of students based there, the computers are old and cannot run the latest packages. Clear instructions to help the students use the computers are not readily available in any of the computer rooms.

81 All classrooms are well equipped with teaching aids. Six of the rooms at Myerscough have slide projectors and video facilities, in addition to overhead projectors and screens. There is a good-quality specialist unit

for the production of audio-visual aids which includes video-editing and photographic processing facilities.

Accommodation

82 All three sites of the college are welcoming and well maintained. They are clean and tidy and students show respect for the environment. The social areas provide pleasant, relaxing accommodation for the students. Bars and halls are well used for social events. There is a good range of playing fields at Myerscough with pitches for all the major team games including an all-weather hockey field. Other sites have adequate playing fields. The college is in the process of building a sports hall at Myerscough.

83 The closure of the Winmarleigh site at the end of this academic year will lead to more effective use of the specialist resources at Hutton and Myerscough and reduce the time teachers spend travelling between sites. It will significantly add to the number of full-time students based at Myerscough and to cope with these additional students, the college has undertaken a review of classroom use and is developing a strategy to improve the efficiency of room usage. The inadequacies in cross-college facilities such as the library, computing and social areas will be accentuated by this increase of students. The college intends to build a new learning-resource centre and planning for the development has started.

84 The Myerscough campus was purpose built in the 1960s. Much of the accommodation is of a high standard. The classrooms are well furnished and in good decorative order. Machinery workshops and laboratories provide a good standard of spacious and well-organised accommodation. In the library there is a shortage of space for students to study and insufficient room to display material. It is heavily used by students; records show there are significant periods when occupancy is at the maximum seating capacity. On some occasions the library is used for tutorial work and the noise produced is a distraction. Access to the library for students with impaired mobility is difficult and access is not possible for anyone in a wheelchair. Capital provision has been made to provide a lift.

85 The teaching accommodation at Hutton varies in quality. The planned closure of this site within the next four years has influenced the extent to which the college has been prepared to carry out major improvements. The rooms in the main buildings are generally of reasonable quality. They are clean and well decorated. The classrooms and student communal areas provide a pleasant, tidy and well-ordered environment. The layout of some classrooms prevents them being used flexibly. The library, laboratory and computer rooms are of adequate size and reasonable quality. The workshops are too small for some of the groups, particularly when students are working on large machinery.

86 The standard of residential accommodation varies between the sites. At Myerscough, it is of a reasonable standard and well furnished. At Hutton and Winmarleigh, the study bedrooms are well decorated but some of the furniture is old and rather worn. The college cannot meet the demand for residential accommodation. A recent survey of students who refused the offer of a place at the college showed that one of the major reasons was the unavailability of residential accommodation. Eighty additional double-study bedrooms will be built at Myerscough to house the students being transferred from Winmarleigh and to extend the provision of on-site residential accommodation.

87 Specialist equine accommodation is generally of good quality. The rise in student numbers is putting pressure on some of this accommodation, for example, the indoor riding school. Stabling for the horses is of a high standard. There is a good range of facilities for students to develop their riding skills; these include an outdoor school, paddocks with jumps, and a cross-country course.

88 There are a number of shortcomings in the specialist animal care accommodation which is housed in converted stock buildings some distance from the main building at Hutton. The animal units are limited in range, size and quality. The dog grooming parlour is too small for some groups and there are no daytime kennelling facilities for dogs or cats. The classrooms used by animal care students are of a lower standard than those found elsewhere in the college, although they have been made more inviting through the effective use of project material, posters and information from industry.

89 There is a good range of horticultural facilities. The recent expansion in the range of specialisms has been well matched by the development of new facilities. Good-quality hard landscape, arboriculture, turf management and floristry workshops have been established. Staff and students have easy access to adjacent classrooms and a central store. The golf course and clubhouse are used effectively for teaching as well as for social activities. The grounds present a wide variety of horticultural features that are attractive and well maintained. They are used frequently and effectively by students. They provide students with a realistic setting for practical work and projects and much of their maintenance and development is carried out by students. Whilst most horticultural buildings adequately serve the learning needs of the students, a few of the glasshouses are in need of refurbishment and updating.

90 The college farms are a major resource. There are farms at the two main centres and a hill farm at Dinkling Green, approximately 13 miles from Myerscough. The farms reflect the types found in the locality. The soil is not able to support the large-scale production of vegetables, so students visit farms in south-west Lancashire to gain experience of this type of production. The farms are run commercially; their management and performance provide a good example for students. The farms have

clear educational objectives, effectively balanced with their commercial goals. When developing a new dairy unit for the Myerscough farm, additional facilities were incorporated to make it easier for students to observe and handle the cattle. In order to broaden the experience of students, the farms carry a wider range of enterprises than would normally be found on a commercial farm.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

91 Myerscough College is working towards achieving its mission to provide high-quality education and training along with research, advisory and consultancy services for the industries it serves. Its strengths include:

- responsiveness to developments in further education which have led to diversification and expansion
- good working relationships with other organisations locally, nationally and internationally
- effective and dynamic planning processes and a high-quality strategic plan
- a board of governors who are supportive of and committed to the work of the college
- the care given to its students
- good teaching and the promotion of learning within a safe environment
- highly-motivated and vocationally-committed students
- a clear, systematic approach to quality assurance.

92 In order to maintain and strengthen the quality of its work the college should:

- foster a consistent, rigorous approach to the implementation and monitoring of cross-college issues
- ensure that management information is full and reliable and is used effectively by managers
- continue improvements to tutorials by making sure all tutors are trained for and consistently apply the system
- enhance library and information technology provision
- discourage staff from undertaking duties which could more efficiently and effectively be undertaken by others
- develop more fully the specialist careers and counselling services and encourage their use
- address the variable pass rates on courses, and monitor more closely the destinations of students.

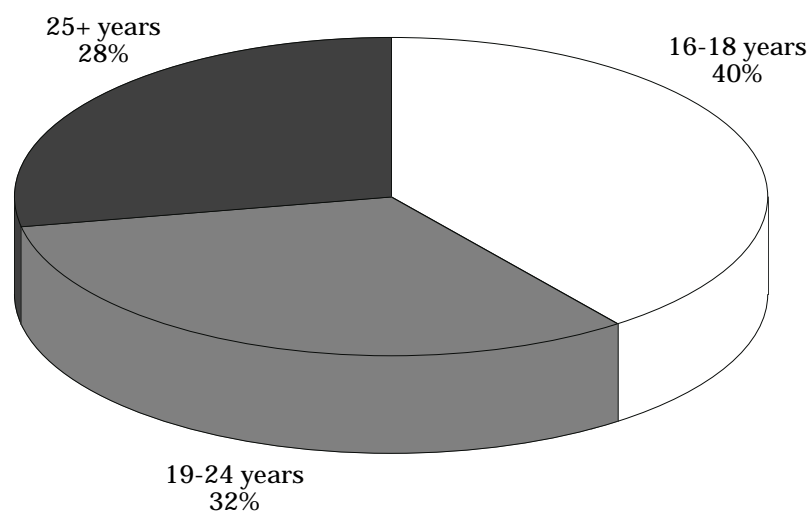
FIGURES

1	Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)
2	Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)
3	Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)
4	Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)
5	Income (for 16 months to July 1994)
6	Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

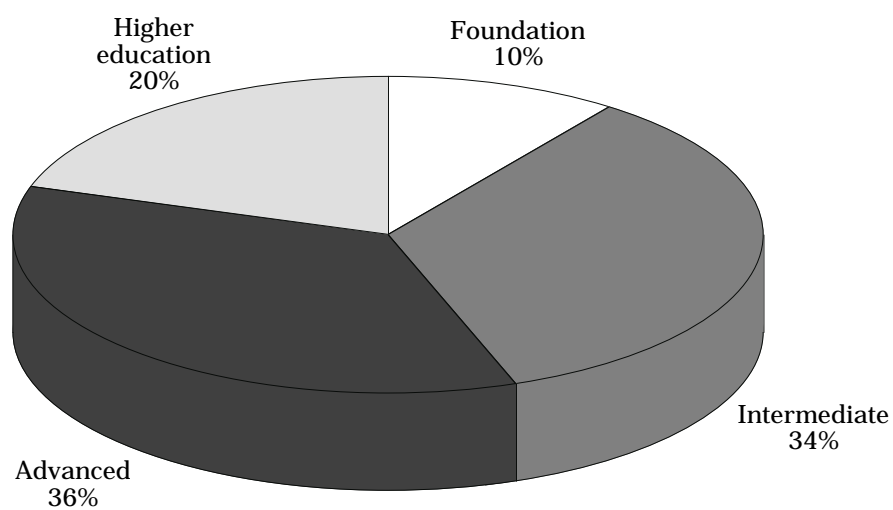
Myerscough College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,436

Figure 2

Myerscough College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,436

Figure 3

Myerscough College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

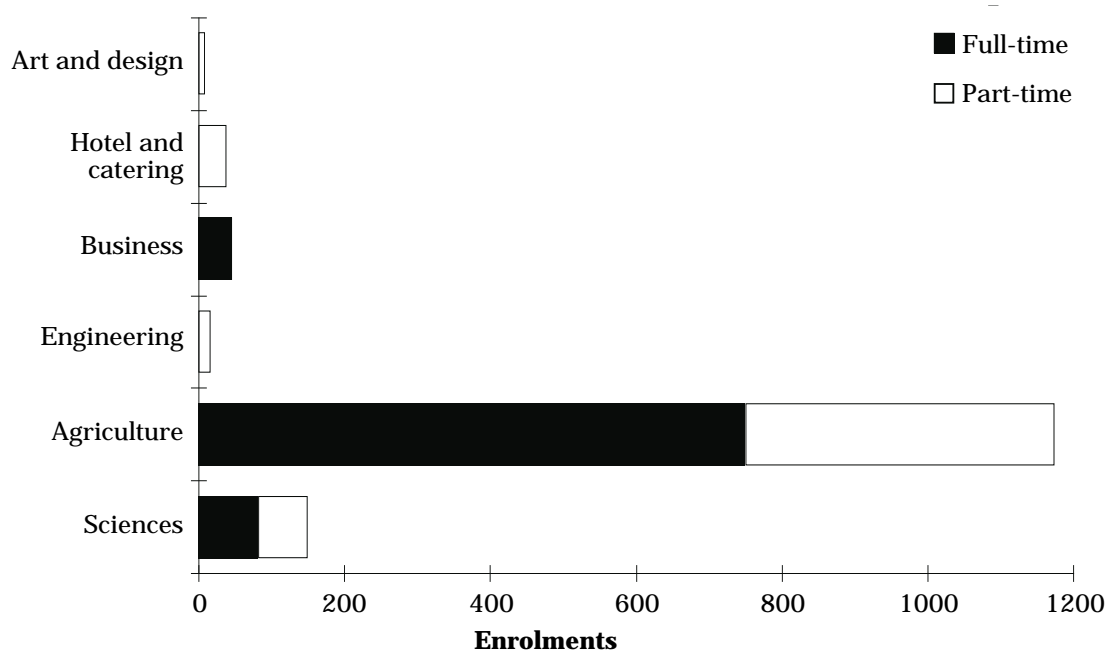


Figure 4

Myerscough College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

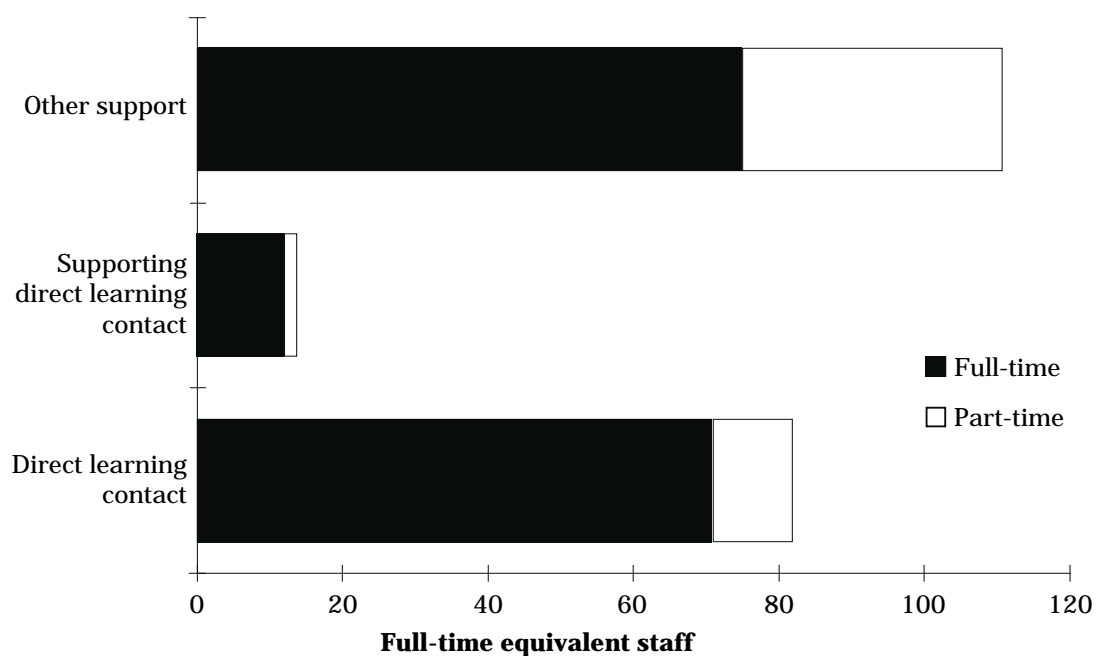
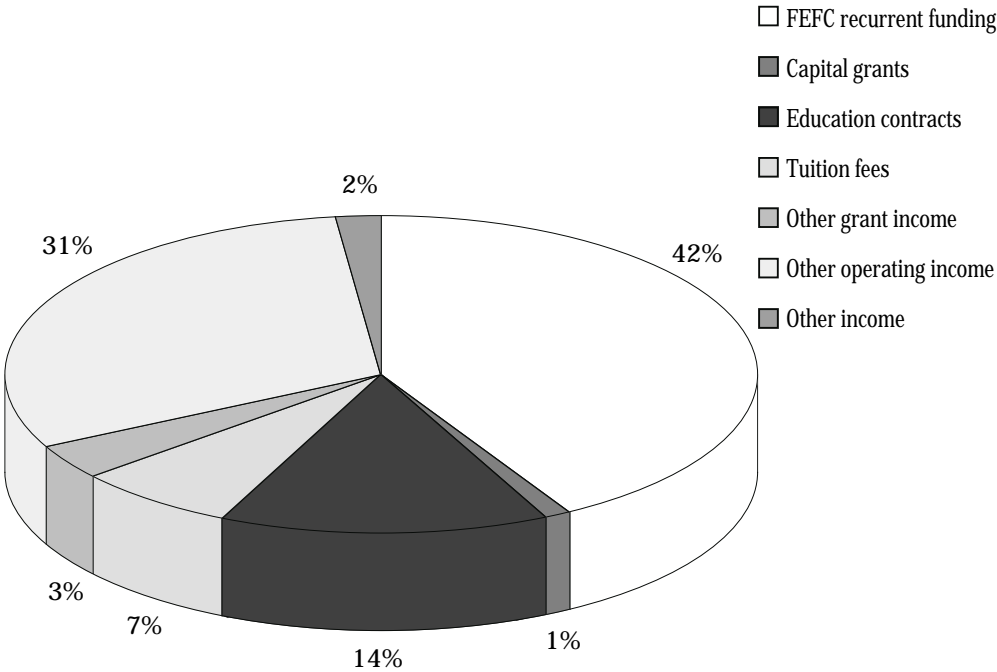


Figure 5

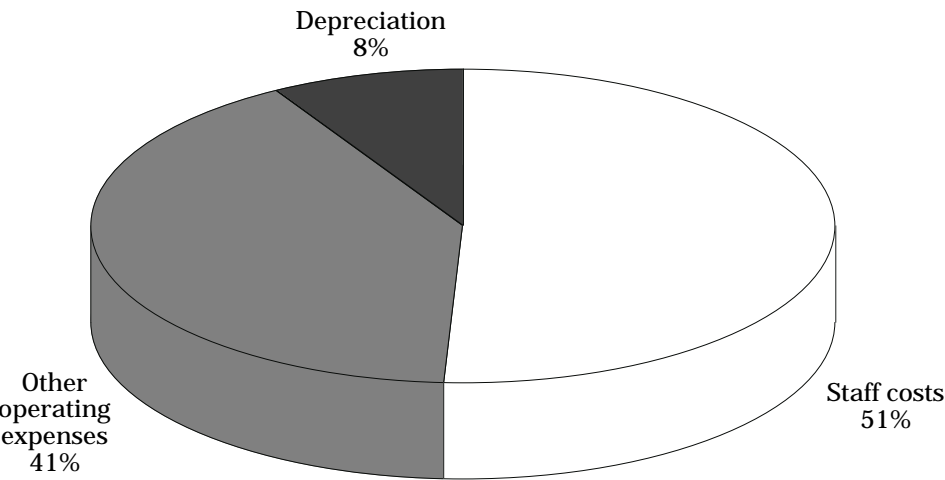
Myerscough College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £9,374,493

Figure 6

Myerscough College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £8,930,055

